



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

EXECUTIVE OFFICES: 50 EAST HURON STREET, CHICAGO 11

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR NEWSLETTER *

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JOINT COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES, 1952 ALA CONFERENCE

At the first session of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups held during the 1952 annual ALA Conference in New York, Lawrence Rogin, education and publicity director of the Textile Workers Union, CIO threw down the gauntlet to librarians. He expressed a firm belief in the importance of reading as a means of developing an intelligent understanding of complex world problems. He emphasized that this understanding was especially important for the workers of this country, not to say the world. He admitted that American trade unions had failed to get their members to read. They hardly can be made to read union announcements or newspapers let alone books or other types of printed materials. This failure he attributed first to the fact that unions are always working under terrific pressures for immediate results and that they seldom have time to deal with long range problems. He also accepted the responsibility for himself and other education directors of not having the time nor the training to discover the types of books that workers can be induced to read. There are few books of fiction written about the labor movement, he added, such as were being written a generation or more ago. The Jack Londons, the Upton Sinclairs and the Ernest Poolles are no longer to be found. It is the job of the librarian to discover the materials and the means. If librarians will spend time discovering what the special interests of workers are and will try to reach them on this level with simple materials he believes they may succeed. Children and family problems as well as community interests are the types of subjects through which the workers, especially the woman worker, can be reached. Although he suggested that the librarian should

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try to reach these potential readers through agencies other than the union, he did feel that librarians and education directors could and should work together to the attainment of this goal of a larger reading public among trade unionists.

Dorothy Bendix, chairman of the Joint Committee and member of the staff of The Detroit Public Library, who was presiding at the meeting, called upon Dorothy Kuhn Oko, of The New York Public Library, to open the discussion. Mrs. Oko returned the challenge of Mr. Rogin by asking why unions do not do more to stimulate the type of writing for which they and all who are concerned with workers' education are constantly searching. Education directors, Mr. Rogin replied, do not control the union purse strings. To get money for such concrete media as the film is in itself an accomplishment. He complimented librarians on the freedom with which they were able to use the controversial film put out by the Textile Workers' Union, Union at Work. Librarians can be of service, he added, in encouraging unions to make greater use of films.

A lively discussion followed on the subject of arousing the interest of workers both in reading and in the use of the other media which libraries have to offer. There were representatives from such a wide range of libraries as Gary, Denver, Cleveland, Buffalo, Scranton and Sharon, Pennsylvania and Newark, to mention only a few that identified themselves. The total impression was one of growing interest and concern. This impression was further confirmed by the meeting that took place on the fourth day of the Conference. What was to have been a small discussion group of about thirty-five turned into an overflow meeting of about seventy-five.

Dorothy Bendix explained that this was to be purely an experience meeting and that after each member of the panel had given a brief picture of some aspect of her work, it was hoped that the audience, too, would tell of their activities or otherwise add to the discussion.

Dorothy Kuhn Oko, in charge of Library Service to Trade Unions, The New York Public Library, led off the discussion by outlining some of the steps that she believed should be taken by a librarian planning to institute a service for labor groups. These included, among others, acquaintance with the labor movement in general and locally; study of the services which the particular library has to offer, such as advisory services, films or film information, special book collections, and reference services; and finally to explore the ways in which these services can be used to meet the needs of the unions in the community.

Bernice Bollenbacher, assistant in the Sociology Division, Cleveland Public Library, told of some of the ways in which her Library had served labor. A special section of labor books was arranged in the Division and a bi-monthly Memo to Labor was issued. The Memo features special services such as films and shut-in-service. It also includes brief reviews of books and pamphlets of interest to union members. She urged administrators, if there were any present, to give as much support as possible to librarians carrying on work in this difficult but important field.

Robert L. Hirst, acting director of The Group Service Department, Akron Public Library, explained the relationship of his department to the Business and Labor Service, which is a reference service available to both business and labor as well as to the public. This special reference service helps labor groups to gather material for collective bargaining and to locate information on pending legislation and on such topics as "managing a cooperative." The Group Service Department gives assistance in planning education meetings, and keeps unions informed of films of interest to labor. A collection of books is taken to CIO Council

meetings and circulated to members. Book and pamphlet displays are arranged for union conferences.

Mrs. Helen F. Hirson, extension librarian, Boston Public Library, told of the progress she has made in getting to know union leaders, by going to Labor Council meetings and other meetings of unions. To these meetings, she takes collections of books which not only help to introduce her to the unions but also help to introduce them to the Library. She also touched briefly on two highly successful exhibits staged cooperatively with labor groups during the past year. One entitled, Labor's Role in the Community, was displayed at the library. The other was an exhibit at the union-industry show.

Ruth Shapiro, Group Service Department, Milwaukee Public Library, emphasized the work which they have been doing with various agencies in the community carrying on workers' education programs. This ranges from programs conducted within the unions, to such short term activities as the Institute of the International Association of Machinists and to formal programs run by the workers' schools.

Betty Day, Social Science and Labor Division, Newark Public Library, had the following suggestions for the librarian with limited time and limited funds: have a labor shelf with books and pamphlets on labor and publications by unions, especially by local unions; go to union meetings as often as possible, with or without books, to talk about special features of the library that might be of help to labor. If time is available she recommended the publication of a newsletter telling about new books and materials for labor as well as about library activities in which labor might be interested. Or if time is at too much of a premium, she suggested a regular column in the labor or the local press.

Again, the question of finding books that workers will read predominated the discussion, but no new light was thrown upon this subject. There seemed to be no easy answer to finding books for workers anymore than there is an easy answer to finding books for the other thousands of individuals who are not users of the library or of any other book serving agency. Russell Munn, librarian of the Akron Public Library perhaps gave the best answer, when he said: "This is a slow tough job. There is no need to get discouraged. It must be faced on a long term basis, with patience and perseverance."

Certainly, the small group of librarians who are devoting all or a portion of their time to this type of work had every reason to be encouraged by the signs of a growing and serious concern with this phase of library work throughout the country. While the audiences attracted by the meetings were not staggeringly large, they consisted of some who wanted to know where to begin and of others who, in their own quiet way, had made beginnings. Nor was interest limited to the meetings. The display in the lobby of the Waldorf also seemed to attract attention. If all who are interested in this problem could pool their problems and their findings surely an amazing amount of light and hope would emerge. As Dorothy Bendix explained at the opening session, it is with this thought in mind that the Committee publishes the Newsletter and is planning to publish a Handbook on Library Service to Labor Groups. Greater and greater cooperation among librarians as well as with the labor movement will in time establish this work on the firm foundations which it so obviously deserves.

Dorothy Kuhn Oke,
In charge of Library
Service to Trade Unions,
The New York Public Library

TWO EXHIBITS AT ONE BLOW

By Mrs. Helen F. Hirson, Extension Librarian
Boston Public Library

Upon the generous offer of a full size, courtesy booth at the annual, national A. F. of L. Union Industries Show, held in Boston, May 10-17, 1952, the Boston Public Library made every effort to plan an attractive exhibit on Library Service to Labor with participation on the part of the spectators. The purpose of the show was, as expected, to educate the public to purchase union-made products and services, to encourage better relations with employers, and to build more widespread understanding and good will for organized labor. In one sense, it was a joint show as management and industry contributed elaborate, eye-catching, and "live" exhibits. Attendance was stimulated by expensive door prizes and numerous free samples. The show in Boston had an attendance of eight hundred thousand, breaking the record of any show held at Mechanics Building.

In order to have as large an array of books as possible, the Library booth was U-shaped with a high, seven-foot back wall and three counters spaciouly and colorfully displaying 75 books well illuminated by three floodlights. In the center of the back wall under raised letters, "Here Are the Answers," there was placed a large "wheel of information." Around the wheel were twelve questions on labor which could be answered by turning a red arrow on the question. For each question there were three openings on the board revealing the author, title, and page where a full answer could be found. The most popular questions were:

What does your shop steward do for you?

What part did labor play in bringing about free, public education?
(Particularly popular with young people.)

Where can you find a sample contract for your union?

An electric, rotating red-white-and-blue carousel, which held twelve books in colorful jackets, added animation, gaiety and interest.

Just as good library practice recommends more than one source, the "wheel of information" was supplemented by material for distribution - one a booklist, Here Are the Answers, listing four titles for each of the twelve questions and the other, a colorful flyer, See What Your Library Is Doing for Labor. Anyone interested in these lists and flyers will receive them upon request.

There was no doubt that the Library exhibit was an example of good public relations for almost one million people who visited the show. "Oh, the Boston Public Library is here too!" was always exclaimed with pleasant surprise. Repeatedly, people expressed their amazement that so many books have been published on labor. A week after the show, the chairman of the Education Committee of the International Association of Machinists telephoned the Library to request a deposit of books at her shop as she had just become acquainted with our service from her visit to the Library booth at the Union Industries Show. It almost seemed too sudden to be real, but the note of credibility appears when it must be confessed that it has been the only direct response so far.

The attractive, well-lighted booth would never have been as successful if it had not been for the assistance of so many staff members. To the prevalent problem of insufficient staff and lack of time of all libraries, perhaps one solution is having many persons participate just a little to put over a big project. At least, that is what happened with the Union Industries Show. It became infectious, everyone began to volunteer to help the library booth. The initiative and enthusiasm seemed to spread through every department of the Library from the

Exhibits Office, the Shipping Department to all of the Buildings Department, and even to the Maintenance Employees Union, Local 1314, who volunteered to help man the booth. It seemed that everyone wanted to "get in on the act."

The carousel and "wheel of information" into which so much work had gone, were used again as the focal points of the Library exhibit at the eleventh annual Institute of the Committee on Education of the Massachusetts Federation of Labor, held at Lowell Institute on June 11-13. The same booklist, Here Are the Answers, accompanied the "wheel of information" and was available for distribution.

A favorable place on the program was assigned to Mrs. Helen F. Hirson, who described the Boston Public Library's service to trade unions. At the end of her talk, she reversed the customary practice of waiting for the audience to ask questions; instead she asked questions of the audience by having the "wheel of information" on the platform and by turning the red arrow to three questions. To be sure, a few selected persons were previously coached to give the answers if need be, but none of these prepared persons had to be called on, for the audience fell promptly into the spirit of the question-and-answer technique and raised their hands to volunteer.

A novel feature of the Institute was the filming and recording of the formal and informal activities. A 16 mm sound motion picture of 20 minutes duration, is expected to be ready soon. The Library display and Mrs. Hirson will be in the finished motion picture.

USE YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY!

THERE ARE MANY WAYS in which the Library can be of help to you in your work in the union:

THE LIBRARY CAN supply information on a wide range of subjects, such as wage rates, financial reports and histories of corporations, health and pension plans, guaranteed annual wage, state or federal legislation, income tax, consumer reports, foreign aid, etc.

EXAMPLES of questions asked by unions:

What is the wage differential between night and day rates in the printing industry?

What is the Negro population of Detroit?

What is the latest figure in the cost-of-living index, and what was it a year ago?

What countries receive technical assistance?

What states have fair employment legislation?

MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION can be obtained over the telephone.

THE LIBRARY CAN be of help in your union education program by

Compiling book and film lists, either general or on a subject of special interest

Depositing collections of books and pamphlets at your local headquarters

Lending films to make your meetings more interesting

Sending a librarian to one of your meetings to talk about the Library's services

Setting up a display of books and pamphlets at an educational institute or union convention

THE LIBRARY IS SUPPORTED by taxes, everybody's taxes. Its services are free and available to all the people. Make use of it!

THIS STATEMENT is based on the services available at the Detroit Public Library. Depending on the library's size and resources, similar services are available in other parts of the state through the local library or the State Library at Lansing.

The above handbill, contributed by Dorothy Bendix, Assistant to the Home Reading Services Director, Detroit Public Library, was prepared for distribution to delegates to the 1952 convention of the Michigan State Federation of Labor.

NEW CHAIRMEN

With this issue of the NEWSLETTER, Dorothy Bendix retires as editor and as chairman of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Miss Bendix has been with the Committee since its organization in 1948 and has been chairman and editor of the NEWSLETTER since 1949. A great deal of credit should go to Miss Bendix for directing this pioneering work. Her continuous enthusiasm and tireless labors on behalf of the Joint Committee have resulted in increased awareness of the problems and possibilities in bringing libraries and unions together for their mutual benefit.

Ruth Shapiro, Milwaukee Public Library, and Ralph E. McCoy, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Illinois, will serve as co-chairmen. In dividing the work Miss Shapiro will handle arrangements for meetings and Mr. McCoy will edit the NEWSLETTER.

HELP WANTED

The new editor asks your help in four respects:

1. Put him on the mailing list for any periodical, accessions list, or other printed matter that you issue relating to library work with labor unions.
2. Keep him informed of any project, service, exhibit, or other new development in library and union cooperation that would be of interest to librarians or union education workers. Don't be modest!
3. Send him any ideas for articles, reviews, features, etc. that you would like to see (or write) in the NEWSLETTER.
4. Send him the names of persons or institutions that should be on the mailing list for the NEWSLETTER.